

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ACCRA 07270 041604Z

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TAGS: PFOR GH OCON UNESCO

SUBJ: UNESCO CONFERENCE: SUBSTANCE OF AFRICAN INTERVENTIONS.

BEGIN SUMMARY: AFRICAN DEBATEREVEALED WIDE AND DEEP DISTRUST
CONTINUED FOREIGN INFLUENCE ON INDIGENOUS CULTURES THROUGH
AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN INPUT IN MASS MEDIA, COMMUNICATIONS
SATELLITES, CONTINUED AFRICAN DEPENDENCE ON EUROPEAN LANGUAGES,
AND ONE-WAY IMPACT OF CULTURAL EXCHANGES. PRACTICAL EFFECT THIS
CONFERENCE LIKELY TO BE FURTHER TIGHTENING OF CONTROLS ON FOREIGN
INPUTS TO AFRICAN MEDIA AND CULTURAL SCENE. END SUMMARY.

1. AS CONFERENCE BEGAN REACHING FOR SYNTHESIS OF VAST RANGE OF
IDEAS EXPRESSED AND SUGGESTIONS MADE IN INITIAL PHASE, WIDESPREAD
WARINESS OF FOREIGN CULTURAL INFLUENCES EMERGED AS A COMMON THEME.
INDEED DIRECTOR-GENERAL M'BOW'S OPENING SPEECH SUGGESTED THAT A
BASIC RATIONALE OF THE ENTIRE CONFERENCE WAS THE NEED FOR
CULTURAL EMANCIPATION TO FOLLOW UP EFFORTS AT POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION AFTER SOME FIFTEEN YEARS OF DECOLONIZATION.

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PAGE 02 ACCRA 07270 041604Z

2. THIS WARINESS WAS EXPRESSED PRIMARILY IN RELATION TO MASS MEDIA,

AND SUGGESTED THAT OUTSIDE INFLUENCES (NORMALLY EUROPE AND AMERICA WERE SPECIFIED), WITH THEIR GREATER SOPHISTICATION AND TECHNICAL SKILLS, HAD EXCESSIVE INFLUENCE NOT ONLY OVER MEDIA THEMSELVES BUT OFTEN OVER FOREIGN-ORIENTED ELITES THAT RAN MEDIA. IN WORDS OF DRAFT REPORT OF COMMISSION IN (ON OPERATION OF CULTURAL ACTIVITIES) THE MEDIA WERE SEEN AS "PRIMARILY... AN AUXILIARY FITTED TO SPREAD FOREIGN CULTURES AND PATTERNS. EVEN AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL IT WAS IN THE HANDS OF AN ELITE WHOSE CONTACTS WITH CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE PEOPLE WERE OFTEN UNCERTAIN... THERE COULD BE NO EFFECTIVE CULTURAL POLICY, AT LEAST IN AFRICA, UNLESS IT INCLUDED A COMMUNICATIONS POLICY AND PROVIDED FOR PROGRAM SUPERVISION BY CULTURAL AUTHORITIES."

3. BESIDES CONTROL IN THE HANDS OF AFRICAN AUTHORITIES, THE REMEDY PRESCRIBED WAS MUCH MORE EFFORT, SUPPORT AND TRAINING TO THE END OF SUPPLYING AFRICAN MASS MEDIA AND PARTICULARLY THE HIGHLY PERVASIVE AND PERSUASIVE RADIO, TV AND CINEMA--WITH GENUINE AFRICAN CONTENT TO DISPLACE THAT SEEN AS FOREIGN ORIENTED TODAY. THE SAME CONCERN WAS ALSO EXPRESSED QUOTE EMPHATICALLY AS REGARDS COMMUNICATIONS SATELLITES. IN AN ETHIOPIAN PRESENTATION, THE DETERMINATION WAS EXPRESSED THAT AFRICA NOT BECOME "A DUMPING GROUND FOR CHEAP CULTURE". AND A GHANAIAAN DRAFT RESOLUTION INSISTED THAT POLICY OF SATELLITES "PROVIDE GOVERNMENTS OF RECEIVING COUNTRIES WITH ADEQUATE CONTROLS".

4. PROMOTION OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES IS SEEN AS ANOTHER SAFEGUARD AGAINST INROADS OF FOREIGN CULTURE. THE FIRST DAY'S RODUCTIO OF DRAFT RESOLUTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS EVINced NO LESS THAN SEVEN SPONSORED BY TEN COUNTRIES DEALING IN WHOLE OR PART WITH ROLE OF AFRICAN VS. EUROPEAN (READ ENGLISH AND FRENCH) LANGUAGES. IT WAS URGED THAT SOME AFRICAN LANGUAGES ALREADY HAD A DEGREE OF INTERNATIONAL CURRENCY, AS THEY REFLECTED THE SPILLOVER OF TRIBES ACROSS NATIONAL BORDERS, WHILE A FEW, NOTABLY HAUSA AND SWAHILI, HAD ALREADY DEMONSTRATED THEIR USEFULNESS AS VEHICULAR LANGUAGES FOR WHOLE REGIONS. WITH PROPER TEACHING AND ENCOURAGEMENT, PUBLICATIONS, AND THE LIKE, THEIR INFLUENCE COULD SPREAD. IT WAS STRESSED THAT LANGUAGES WERE MORE THAN SIMPLY SYMBOLS OF FOREIGN NATIONALITIES; THEY WERE THEMSELVES INFUSED WITH CULTURAL CONTENT AND TENDED TO BOTH REFLECT AND SHAPE THE THOUGHT PROCESSES OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 ACCRA 07270 041604Z

USERS. THE CLAIM OF SUPERIOR RICHNESS OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGES, SAID MORE THAN ONE SPEAKER, WAS VALID, IF AT ALL, ONLY IN CONTEXT OF THE ORIGINAL CULTURE; AFRICAN LANGUAGES WERE RICHER AS VEHICLES FOR EXPRESSION OF AFRICAN CULTURE.

5. CULTURAL EXCHANGES WERE ALSO SEEN AS PURVEYORS OF FOREIGN CULTURE WORTHY AT LEAST OF CAREFUL WATCHING, ALTHOUGH THE APPROACH IN THIS AREA WAS GENERAL MORE POSITIVE --I.E. ENCOURAGING MORE INTE-

AFRICAN EXCHANGES. NEVERTHELESS FRUSTRATION WAS SEVERAL TIMES EXPRESSED AT FACT THAT CULTURAL EXCHANGES WITH THE NON-AFRICAN WORLD TENDED TO BE "A ONE-WAY JOURNEY" DESIGNED TO EDUCATE AFRICANS ABOUT EUROPEAN CULTURE BUT NEVER THE REVERSE.

6. COMMENT: WHILE MOST CONFERENCE DELEGATES ARE REALISTS AND AWARE OF THE LIMITATIONS OF THEIR OWN RESOURCES FOR THE PROMOTION OF CULTURAL OBJECTIVES, THEY ARE NONETHELESS FERVENT IN EXPRESSING WHAT IS UNQUESTINABLY A DEEPLY AND WIDELY FELT CONCERN. THERE SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT THAT WHAT PRACTICAL INFLUENCE THIS CONFERENCE WILL HAVE IN AFRICA WILL BE IN THE DIRECTION OF LIMITING FURTHER THE AVAILABLE SCOPE FOR STRAIGHTFORWARD PROMOTION OF FOREIGN-- INCLUDING U.S.-- CULTURE AND MEDIA PRODUCTS. THE STRONGLY EXPRESSED VIEWS OF LANGUAGE MAY ALSO, OVER TIME, INFLUENCE RECEPTIVIITY TO BOOKS AND EVEN RADIO BROADCASTS IN ENGLISH AND OTHER NON-AFRICAN LANGUAGES.
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